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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002139

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SHI'A POLITICAL PARTIES STRUGGLE TO FORM A NEW  
ELECTORAL COALITION

REF: A. BAGHDAD2105

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD2014

Classified By: MINISTER COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS GARY A. GRAPPO  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The Shi'a political parties that comprised the United Iraqi Coalition (UIC) in 2005 are negotiating intensely to form a new alliance to contest parliamentary elections in January 2010. Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) leaders had hoped to announce the new coalition on August 7 to coincide with the Shi'a Shabaniya holiday but were unable to reach consensus with other prospective members, including PM Maliki's Da'wa Party. Muqtada al-Sadr appears to be angling for a broader role in a new alliance by distancing the Sadr Trend from Shi'a militant group Asaib Ahl al-Haq. Meanwhile, Da'wa is seeking to build on the gains it made in 2009 provincial elections to attract non-Shi'a partners and gain more control over any eventual grand cross-sectarian coalition. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

"NATIONAL IRAQI ALLIANCE" NOT READY FOR PRIMETIME  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) According to our contacts and media reports, five of the six main Shi'a parties that comprised the UIC in 2005 -- ISCI, Badr Organization, Da'wa, Da'wa Tantheem, and Sadr Trend -- have been negotiating since May to work out the parameters for a new alliance, while Fadhila claims to have been sidelined from discussions (ref A). On August 4, MP Jalal al-Din al-Saghir (ISCI) told the Iraqi media that the new Shi'a coalition would be announced on August 7 to coincide with the Shi'a Shabaniya holiday (marking the birthday of Imam Mahdi, the twelfth imam) and that two committees would be set up to discuss power-sharing and to reach out to non-Shi'a political parties and entities. During his weekly sermon on August 7, al-Saghir announced a new timeline, saying ISCI would announce a new alliance by Thursday August 13, which he said would include some Christian and Sunni groups. He did not mention Da'wa. MP Falih al-Fayyad (UIC/National Reform Trend) told the press that the coalition would be called the "National Iraqi Alliance" to help emphasize its allegedly non-sectarian nature. Finance Minister Jabr (UIC/Independent) told Ambassador Hill August 5 that there would be an announcement about a new coalition "soon."

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to press reports, MP Humam Hammoudi (UIC parliamentary bloc leader and representative of UIC Chairman Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim) met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani on August 3 to discuss the future of the coalition (ref B). UIC Deputy Chair Ali al-Adeeb (Da'wa) was quick to quash speculation that this meeting constituted proof of an agreement on a new Shi'a coalition. Adeeb complained to the Iraqi media that "one side wants to revive the UIC before engaging in a comprehensive dialogue with other political groups." He added that the Da'wa party refused to join a new alliance unless its new electoral strength, as demonstrated

in the 2009 provincial elections, is taken into account.

#### DA'WA BETS ON A BETTER DEAL AHEAD

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¶4. (C) PM Maliki and his party appear to be undecided about the value of reviving the original UIC, versus attempting to form a broader coalition friendlier to their interests. Da'wa spokesman Haider al-Abadi told the Iraqi press on July 21 that Da'wa had decided not to join a new Shi'a coalition. MP Qassim Daoud (UIC/Solidarity) told poloffs on July 28 that a public announcement about a coalition was delayed three times because Maliki and the Da'wa party were uncertain about whether to join. Da'wa Parliamentary Secretary Ahmad Mofeed relayed to poloffs on July 23 that Maliki and Da'wa leadership were reluctant to join a new Shi'a coalition unless it allowed the entire membership to vote to select the new chairperson. (COMMENT: This would inherently weaken the position of the current chairman, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, although it is unlikely that Maliki would have enough popular support among all Shi'a parties to become chairman. END COMMENT.)

¶5. (C) A close confidante of Maliki, MP Sami al-Askary (Da'wa), commented to poloff August 5 that ISCI appeared to be "moving unnecessarily quickly" to form a new alliance, possibly to take advantage of the symbolism of Shabaniya. The Prime Minister reportedly told al-Askary on August 2 that he refused to take part in a "premature decision" to join a new list that had not worked out critical issues of membership and decision-making, and that could not appeal to a wider range of political entities.

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#### ROLE OF SADR TREND UNCLEAR

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¶6. (SBU) Sadr Trend spokesman MP Ahmed al-Mas'udi told the local press August 6 that his party was undecided about whether to join the new coalition. In what seemed to be an attempt to retool his image, on August 5 Muqtada al-Sadr distanced his party from the Shi'a militant group Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), reiterating that AAH did not set the political direction of the party and was not an official representative of the Sadr Trend. (NOTE: AAH claimed to renounce violence in a public statement on August 4. Septel to follow. END NOTE.)

#### THE RISE OF "NATIONALIST" LISTS

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¶7. (C) Despite the many challenges to fostering non-sectarian parties and coalitions (ref A), several political leaders have told us that they are pushing forward on this front. Deputy PM Rafi al-Issawi (Tawafuq/Sunni) told MNF-I BG Lanza and poloff on July 29 that he and Planning Minister Ali Baban (Tawafuq/Sunni Kurd) are trying to form a "true nationalist" coalition. He claimed they had held serious discussions with former PM Ayad Allawi (Iraqiyya), MP Saleh Mutlaf (Hewar), MP Osama al-Najaifi (al-Hadba), and Interior Minister Bolani (UIC).

¶8. (C) Deputy PM Barham Saleh (PUK) told poloff on August 4 he doubts ISCI will rejoin the UIC with Maliki because Maliki will insist his remaining prime minister in any new government as a condition for joining. He expressed his dismay that for now, Ahmed Chalabi may be the leading UIC candidate for prime minister.

¶9. (U) MP Abbas al-Bayati (UIC/Turkmen Union) confirmed in interviews with the Iraqi press on August 6 that further consultations are necessary before announcing the final structure of a new Shi'a coalition. He predicted that the new group would coalesce by the end of Ramadan

(mid-September) and would include most of the original Shi'a parties (ISCI, Badr, Da'wa, Sadr Trend) and bring in the Turkmen Union, several Sahwa leaders, and the Iraqi People's Conference Party (Sunni). (COMMENT: We have seen no firm evidence to date indicating the inclusion of these non-Shi'a groups. END COMMENT.)  
HILL